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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the extent to which the gender and social status of the complimenter as well as the gender of the receiver account for the choice of strategy Americans and Thais use to respond to compliments. Subjects were 40 American university students in the United States and 40 Thai students in Thailand. In a discourse-completion test, each subject responded orally to 16 compliment situations; each was then interviewed. Results suggest that there are both similarities and differences in both groups. Analysis revealed 13 compliment response types, placed on a continuum between acceptance (agreement) and rejection (disagreement and avoidance of self-praise). Acceptance occurred most frequently in both groups, with the Americans using it more often. Americans were also more likely to give long responses by combining different strategies or repeating a strategy; Thais tended to be brief. Both groups appeared affected by the complimenter's social status; more compliments were accepted from a high-status complimenter, more were rejected from an equal-status complimenter. This pattern was more pronounced among Thais. The study also revealed difficulty in assigning all responses to rigid categories because a number of them could perform multiple functions. It is proposed that there is a continuum of compliment responses in which responses have different degrees of agreement and self-praise avoidance. Contains 24 references. (MSE)

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How American and Thais Respond to Compliments

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How Americans and Thais Respond to Compliments

Abstract

Studies on compliment responses have shown that there are various factors that affect the way people respond to compliments and that different cultures have different response patterns. The goal of this study is to determine the extent to which the gender and social status of the complimenter as well as the gender of the receiver account for the choice of strategy Americans and Thais use to respond to compliments.

The data were collected from 40 American students at the University of Illinois, and another 40 Thai students in Thailand. Each subject was asked to respond orally to the 16 compliment situations in the discourse completion test, and they were interviewed when they had completed the test.

The results suggest that there are both similarities and differences in American English and Thai. The data revealed 13 types of compliment responses, which were placed along a continuum between the poles of acceptance (agreement) and rejection (disagreement and the avoidance of self-praise) (Pomerantz, 1978). Acceptance occurred most frequently in both groups, but Americans tend to use it more often than Thais. Furthermore, Americans are likely to give long responses by combining different strategies in one response, or by repeating the same strategy. Thais, on the other hand, tend to be brief. In addition, both groups appear to be affected by the complimenter's social status. That is, more compliments are accepted from a higher status complimenter, and more are rejected from an equal-status complimenter. However, this pattern was more pronounced in Thai than in American English.

The study also shows that there is difficulty in assigning all responses to rigid categories because a number of them can perform more than one function at the same time. This study, therefore, proposes that there is a continuum of compliment responses in which the responses that fall along the line have different degrees of agreement and self-praise avoidance. It demonstrates that the speaker tries to balance the need to agree with the complimenter while, at the same time, avoiding self-praise.

Introduction

Sociolinguistic studies have shown that speech communities are different in their rules of speaking because the same speech act, such as the act of complimenting, expresses or reinforces a different set of norms, values, expectations, attitudes, beliefs, etc., across communities. Therefore, second language (L2) learners are, at times, unable to express or interpret intended meanings due to a lack of knowledge of the norms of speech behavior in L2. The study of the compliment speech act contributes valuable information concerning when and how and to whom one may offer a compliment as well as how to interpret implicit social and cultural meanings, and how to respond appropriately when one receives a compliment. Compliments responses are

the focus of this study because it involves a number of difficulties for the speaker. On the one hand, if one accepts a compliment, he/she is at risk of being seen as immodest or conceited. On the other hand, if one rejects the compliment, he/she is at risk of violating the norm of politeness by disagreeing with the interlocutor. It is, therefore, interesting to study how people in two different cultures handle this conflict.

Studies on compliment responses show that there are various factors that affect the way people respond to compliments. Holmes (1988b) and Herbert (1990) found that there are gender-based differences in compliments and compliment responses. Wolfson (1989a) contends that social relationships of the interlocutors play an important role in compliment exchanges. This study, therefore, is designed to determine the extent to which the gender and social status of the complimenter as well as the gender of the receiver account for the response strategies used in American English and Thai. The outcomes of the study provide empirical evidence and rich implications not only about the linguistic forms of compliment responses in two different languages, but also about the social etiquette and value systems which are culture-specific. Based upon the findings, implications for teaching compliment responses in American English and Thai are derived.

Compliment responses have been studied cross-culturally by a number of researchers. Manes (1983) reports that besides the most simple and common Thank you, another frequent strategy she found among Americans was to play down the worth of the object complimented. Herbert and Straight (1989) conducted a cross-cultural study of two groups of native English speakers from two different speech communities: white middle-class Americans and white middle-class South Africans. They found that Americans produce more compliments, and are far more likely to reject compliments they receive than are South Africans. The latter, on the other hand, readily accept more compliments and offer few.

Holmes (1988a) studied compliment behavior in New Zealand English. With regard to compliment responses, she found that the common New Zealand response to a compliment is to accept it. The next most frequent is to deflect the credit, and the least frequent is to overtly reject it.

However, the findings in the studies of the Eastern languages seem to suggest the opposite behavior. Azman, 1986 (cited in Holmes, 1988a; p. 504) studied compliment responses among Malaysian students in New Zealand. The findings reveal that rejections are most frequently used by Malaysian students who find it very difficult to accept compliments and prefer to adopt the Malay strategy of rejecting them. Similarly, the Chinese tend to reject or disagree with a compliment by saying No, no, no (Yang, 1987). Chang (1988) and Chen (1993) report that the Chinese subjects in their studies used a disagreement strategy a great deal. By the same token, the Japanese tend to adopt various strategies to avoid self-praise, such as denying a compliment by saying No, no, that's not true, smiling, and being silent (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Daikuhara, 1986). Similarly, Yoon (1991) reports that Koreans tend to deny the complimentary force of the remarks. Yang (1987), Chang (1988), and Yoon (1991) claim that by denying a compliment, one is showing his/her modesty. To accept compliments outright would be considered arrogant in Asian cultures. Richards and Sukwiwat (1983), in their discussion of

language transfer, contend that generally in Thai culture, one does not overtly accept compliments since it may not sound suitably humble. Disagreeing with the complimentary force seems to be an appropriate reply. Klopf and Parks (1983) say that modesty is primary in the East. The above studies of compliment responses from the Eastern perspective seem to support this claim.

With regards to gender-based differences in compliments and their responses, Wolfson (1983, 1984) contends that women appear to offer and receive compliments much more frequently than men. The same pattern has also been found in a comparable New Zealand study by Holmes (1988b). The findings are particularly true of compliments concerning apparel and appearance. Wolfson (1983) indicates that it holds true across compliment types that women are far more likely to be recipients of appearance-based compliments than men are. She contends that when appearance is the topic of a compliment, the addressee is hardly ever male. In addition, there seems to be a rather strong constraint against the giving of appearance-related compliments to higher-status males. However, the same is not true for women who receive compliments on their appearance from both men and women of the same, higher, and lower status.

Herbert (1990) found that compliments offered by males to females are more likely to be accepted. On the other hand, those offered by a female to another female are more likely to be rejected. He suggests that the gender of the complimenter tends to be a good predictor of the form compliment responses will take. Like Wolfson, Herbert claims that compliments from males occur less frequently than from females, and the "easiest" type of compliment to collect is female-female. Similar observations were also made by data collectors working with speakers of South African English (Herbert, 1989).

In this same view, Holmes (1988b) reports that in New Zealand men compliment women far more frequently than they compliment other men. She suggests that compliments are not a preferred male strategy for expressing friendship; therefore, men use them less frequently. At the same time, when men are complimented, she says that they tend to ignore or evade a compliment more than women do. She claims that men seem to avoid a verbal response altogether by ignoring the compliment or responding to other topics or to the focus of the previous utterance. In short, women are likely to view compliments as expressions of positive affects whereas men tend to be embarrassed by compliments and/or consider them face-threatening acts.

Regarding the social status of complimenters and receivers, Wolfson (1983) says that the majority of compliments in American English occur among people of the same status. The same finding was reported in the New Zealand community in Holmes (1988a). When compliments occur in interactions between status unequals, they usually flow from the person of higher status to an addressee of lower status, especially when compliments involve the addressee's ability or performance. It seems that the speaker of higher status is often expected to make judgments regarding some activities or piece of work in order to give encouragement (Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988a; Wolfson, 1983).

When complimenting someone of superior status, the complimenter must have more confidence than would be required to compliment most status equals because there is a possibility of negative interpretation, e.g., that the complimenter is manipulating or flattering the addressee (Holmes, 1988a). It is interesting to note that when the complimenters are brave enough to compliment those of higher status, it is likely that they will compliment higher status women more often than men. Complimenters seem to perceive women of higher status as less intimidating and more receptive (Holmes, 1988b).

Wolfson (1989a) indicates that the status relationship between the complimenter and receiver is the factor affecting the choice of response type. She says that, in American English, when the interlocutors are of equal status, the receivers tend to avoid self-praise. However, in the situations where compliments are given by persons of superior status, a simple Thank you is the safest and most appropriate response. On the contrary, Chang (1988) says that Chinese tend not to accept compliments from those of higher status. They would rather downgrade themselves or simply refer to someone else's effort. However, Chin (1990) found that when the Chinese subjects in her study chose to accept compliments from those of superior status, they would use elaborate appreciation tokens (e.g., Thank you for your praise/ encouragement, Mr. X), which were usually followed by scale-down disagreement or polite disagreement expressions.

Procedure

Subjects

The American subjects for this study were 20 male and 20 female undergraduate students at the University of Illinois. They were students of various disciplines such as liberal arts and sciences, fine and applied arts, engineering, commerce and business administration, and communication. Their years in school ranged from first to fourth year; their ages ranged from 18-25. Ninety percent of them were residents of Illinois; the remainder were from Kentucky, Indiana, and Kansas.

The Thai subjects were of equal number. They were undergraduate students at Chulalongkorn University, Thamasart University, and Kasetsart University, all of which are located in Bangkok, Thailand. They had no contact with native speakers of English and had no exposure to an English-speaking community or any Western society. They were students of various disciplines such as political science, commerce and accountancy, engineering, and mass communication. Their years in school ranged from first to fourth year, with ages ranging from 17-22. Eighty-three percent of them were from Bangkok; the remainder were from other regions of Thailand.

Method

The instrument used was a discourse completion test (DCT) with oral responses. Each item consisted of incomplete discourse sequences that represented socially differentiated situations. Each discourse sequence presented a detailed description of the situation, specifying the gender and social status of the complimenter, factors which were varied systematically. The participants' task was to supply the responses to the situations given. Their responses were tape-recorded.

There were four types of compliment situations with regard to the gender of complimenters and respondents: male-male (M-M), male-female (M-F), female-male, (F-M), and female-female (F-F).

There were sixteen items altogether in the test, eight of which were compliments from men and another eight from women. Table 1 below shows how the test items were distributed according to the complimenter's gender. The situations were also distributed in terms of the social status of the complimenters. Therefore, of the sixteen items, eight were compliments from those of higher status (H), and another eight from those of equal status (E). A higher-status complimenter was represented by a professor, and an equal-status complimenter was represented by a peer. Furthermore, the topic of compliment was held constant. The situations appearing in the instrument included compliments on ability and performance. Finally, the compliments between status unequals would flow only from a higher-status complimenter to a lower-status addressee.

Table 1
Test Items According to the Gender and Social Status of the Complimenters

Respondent	Complimenter	Social Status	no. of items
M	M	H	2
		E	2
	F	H	2
		E	2
F	M	H	2
		E	2
	F	H	2
		E	2

The actual test was written in two versions: American English and Thai. American situations were used in the American version, and Thai situations were used in the Thai version. For example, in a situation involving a compliment on the ability to speak a foreign language, the American subjects were complimented on their fluency in Spanish, while for Thais, they were complimented on their fluency in English. The 16 compliment situations were kept equivalent between the two versions. Therefore, even though the American English and the Thai versions were not linguistically identical, the subjects in both groups responded to compliment situations which were equivalent to each other.

Data Collection Procedure

The instructions for completing the test were typed on a card. To ensure that the subjects understood the instructions, two extra situations were used for practice. Then, the subjects completed the test one situation at a time. They were told to respond to each situation orally by saying the first response that came to mind. They were allowed to talk as long as they wanted.

Each compliment situation and an incomplete dialogue was typed on a separate card. Each card was handed to a subject, who read it and then

assumed the role of the respondent. When finished, the subject put the card on the table and the researcher handed him/her a new one. All responses were tape-recorded.

When the subjects completed the test, they were asked questions regarding their responses. The questions included why they chose particular strategies for particular situations, what factors influenced their choices, how they perceived themselves in the situations, etc. Their insights not only provided additional information regarding their responses but could also be used to interpret the data. The post-test interview was tape-recorded. When further information was needed, follow-up interviews were conducted on the telephone.

Categorization and Data Analysis

Based upon the frameworks developed by Herbert (1989) and Holmes (1988a), there are thirteen response types which can be grouped into three categories: acceptance, rejection, and indirection. The present study's framework for analyzing the data is comprised of the following response types.

I. Acceptance Category: the respondent accepts and agrees with the compliment.

A. Praise Upgrade e.g., I'm a great cook.
B. Agreement e.g., I like it too.
C. Bald Acceptance e.g., I worked hard for it.
D. Appreciation e.g., Thank you.
E. Return e.g., You too.
F. Concerns e.g., I'm glad you liked it.

II. Rejection Category: the respondent does not accept the credit attributed.

A. Scale Down e.g., It was pure luck.
B. Qualification e.g., But I think I need to retake some pictures.
C. Disagreement e.g., I don't think so.

III. Indirection Category: the respondent does not clearly indicate whether he/she accepts the compliment or not. The responses in this category cannot be exclusively assigned to either the acceptance or the rejection category.

A. Shift Credit e.g., I got the recipe from my grandma.
B. Doubting e.g., Do you really think so?
C. Question e.g., Why did you find it interesting?
D. Others e.g., Thanks for coming to the show.

Since the subjects were allowed to talk as long as they wanted, there could be more than one response to a single compliment situation. For example, the respondent might make two responses as in Thank you. I have a good trainer, or three responses as in Really? Thank you. I'm glad you liked it.

Each response was considered a unit of analysis. For example, in Thank you. I like it, too, there are two units of analysis, namely, Thank you and I like it, too. A score of 1 was given to every unit. Therefore, Thank you received 1 score, and I like it, too received another 1 score.

Every response was categorized according to the response type to which it belonged. For example, Thanks a lot was categorized in acceptance.

Thank you. It was just luck was categorized in acceptance and rejection respectively.

Results

When the subjects were presented with the compliment situations, they usually responded with one response type. Occasionally, they responded with several responses. Each type was scored, so there could be more than one response type in each situation.

The results from the primary analysis provides an overview of how each response type was used in American English and Thai. The data deal with each response type when the counts of each type are from single and joint occurrences combined. For example, the acceptance in any situation refers to an acceptance type which occurs either alone or mixed with its own subtypes and/or other types of responses. The frequencies given are the average scores per four situations. In some situations, acceptance type was used more than once , therefore, its mean frequency is higher than four.

American Versus Thai Responses

Table 2

Mean Frequency of Response Types in Each Language (N= 80 per mean)

Type	American English		Thai	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Acceptance	4.91	2.17	2.53	1.11
Rejection	1.07	1.14	1.61	1.29
Indirection	0.75	0.85	0.84	0.97

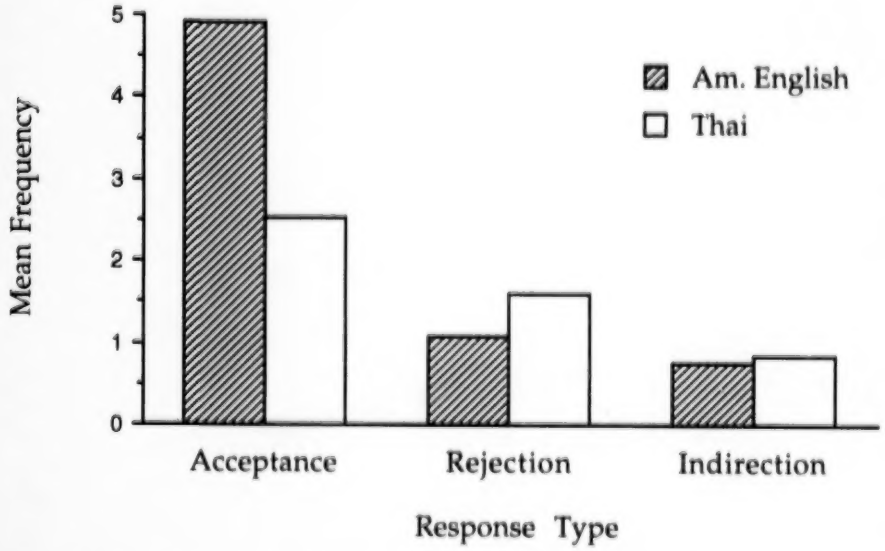

Figure 1. Mean frequency of response types in each language.

The ANOVA results showed significant type by language effect, F (2/152) = 63.36, p<.01, which indicates that Americans and Thais respond to compliments differently. The Tukey HSD comparisons on an "honest significant difference" test indicate that Americans and Thais are significantly different at p<.01 for acceptance type responses but not for rejection or indirection. That is, Americans are more likely to accept the compliment by saying Thank you, I like it too, etc.

Responses of Male and Female Respondents

The ANOVA results showed no significant type by respondent's gender effect.

Responses to Male Versus Female Complimenters

Table 3
Mean Frequency of Response Types by Complimenter's Gender
(N = 80 per mean)

Type	Am. Male		Thai Male		Am. Female		Thai Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Acceptance	5.05	2.07	2.50	1.09	4.76	1.77	2.55	1.15
Rejection	1.18	1.24	1.90	1.28	0.96	0.92	1.31	1.22
Indirection	0.49	0.70	0.71	0.94	1.01	1.02	0.98	0.89

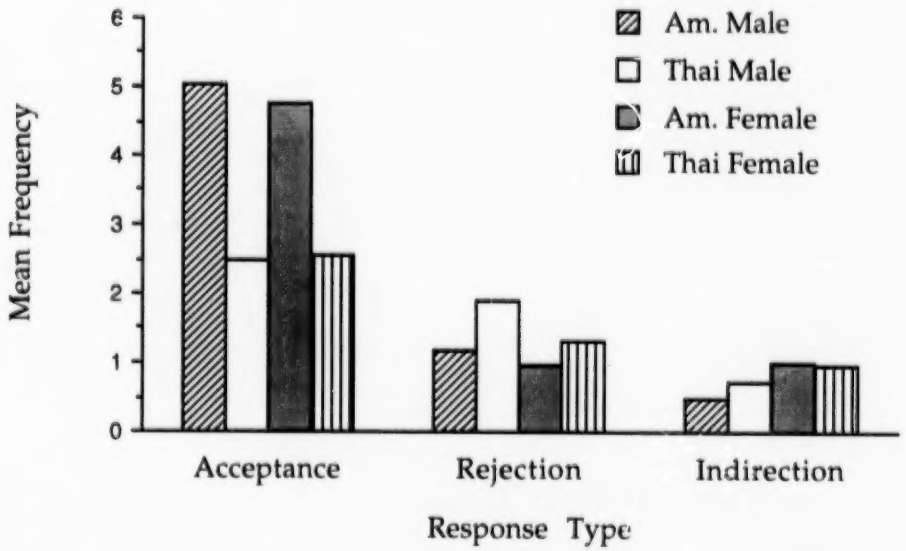

Figure 2. Mean frequency of responses types by complimenter's gender.

The ANOVA comparison of responses to male and female complimenters shows a significant type by complimenter's gender effect, F (2/152) =10.26, p<.01. The results indicate that the responses are different

when complimenters are male than when they are female. The rejection type response occurred more frequently when compliments were offered by males, whereas the indirection type occurred more often when complimenters were females, for example, with the response Really?, My mom helped me make it. However, acceptance is common to both male and female complimenters. Furthermore, the means for both males and females were not significantly different within any of the three response types according to the Tukey HSD comparisons, indicating that the effect is quite subtle. There was no significant type by complimenter's gender by language interaction, indicating that while American and Thai responses differ, their responses to male and female complimenters are parallel across cultures.

Responses to Higher-Status Versus Equal-Status Complimenters

Table 4

Mean Frequency of Response Types by Complimenter's Social Status

(N = 80 per mean)

Type	Am. Higher		Thai Higher		Am. Equal		Thai Equal	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Acceptance	5.29	2.17	3.12	1.15	4.53	1.64	1.94	1.07
Rejection	0.64	0.76	1.08	1.13	1.50	1.37	2.16	1.36
Indirection	0.86	0.84	0.80	0.86	0.65	0.90	0.89	0.96

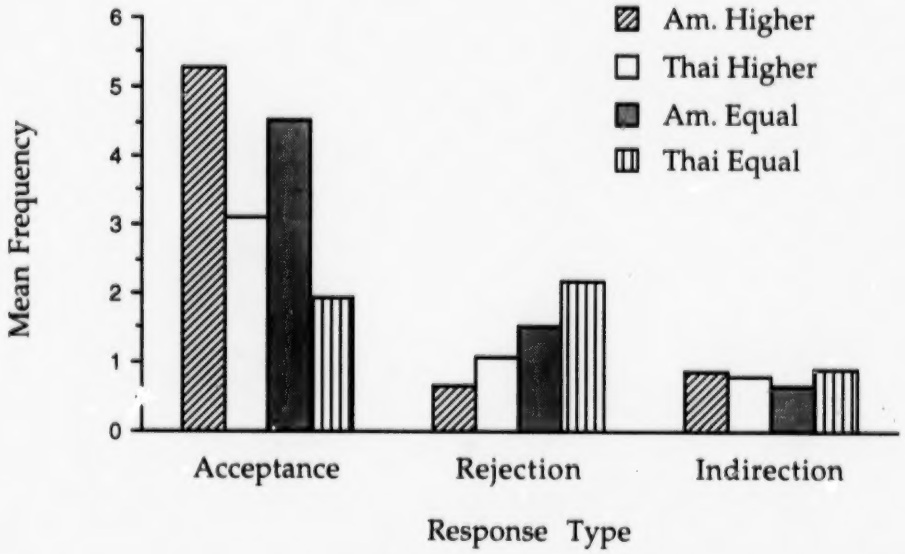

Figure 3. Mean frequency of response types by complimenter's social status.

These data indicate that compliments from higher-status complimenters are more likely to be accepted whereas compliments from equal-status complimenters are more likely not to be. This interpretation is

supported by a type by complimenter's social status effect, F (2/152) = 67.93, p<.01 from the ANOVA and the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01, more compliments being accepted from a higher-status complimenter than from an equal-status complimenter, but more were rejected from an equal-status complimenter.

Furthermore, there was no type by complimenter's social status by language interaction, indicating that while Americans accept compliments more often than Thais, and while both groups are more likely to accept the compliments of professors than those of peers, their responses to higher- and equal-status complimenters do not differ significantly across cultures.

Single and Multiple Responses

In the previous section, the frequency of each type comes from single and joint instances combined. This section presents a more refined analysis, where the single and joint occurrences are compared. Each response consists of one type. Furthermore, the same type may be repeated such as acceptance with acceptance (e.g., Thank you. I like it too.), or rejection with rejection (e.g., I don't think so. John's over there is much better). So, a response can contain a single instance of one type, or it can contain the same type repeated. The latter will be called a multiple response and the former a single response. When the subjects used multiple responses, most of the time they repeated the same type twice. However, there were times when they repeated it more than twice.

This section presents the mean frequency of single and multiple responses, followed by the analysis of variance results. All means and standard deviations for all cells appear in Tables 5 and 6 below. In Tables 5 and 6 and Figures 4 and 5, Type 1 indicates acceptance, Type 2 rejection, and Type 3 indirection. Double numerals indicate multiple responses, regardless of the number of responses they contain.

Table 5
Mean Frequency of Single and Multiple Response Types: Higher Status Only (N = 80 per mean)

Type	American		Thai	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	1.59	1.30	2.27	1.16
11	1.12	1.00	0.12	0.35
2	0.12	0.32	0.38	0.65
22	0.04	0.20	0.19	0.43
3	0.27	0.54	0.48	0.60
33	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.12

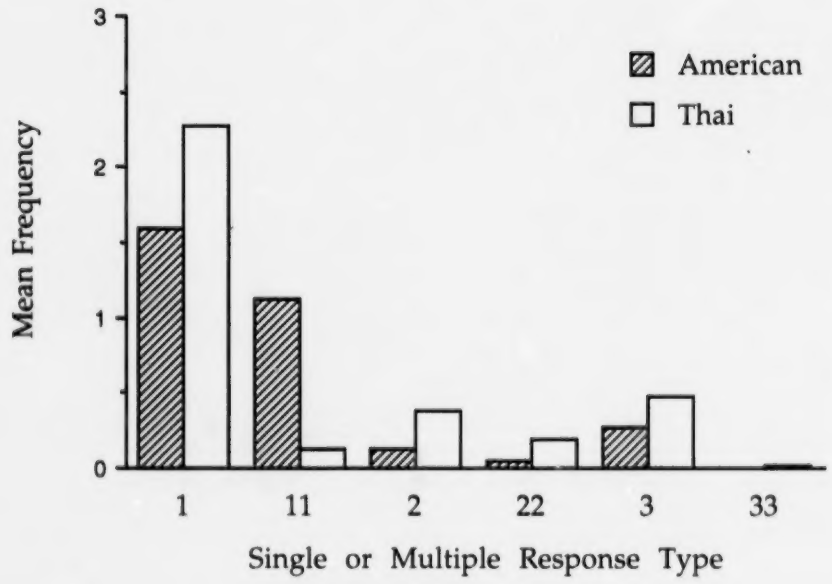

Figure 4. Single and multiple responses: Higher status only.

Table 6
Mean Frequency of Single and Multiple Response Types: Equal Status Only
(N = 80 per mean)

Type	American		Thai	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	1.34	1.30	1.44	1.04
11	0.80	0.90	0.05	0.22
2	0.38	0.62	1.13	1.01
22	0.08	0.26	0.35	0.57
3	0.20	0.43	0.55	0.70
33	0.05	0.22	0.04	0.20

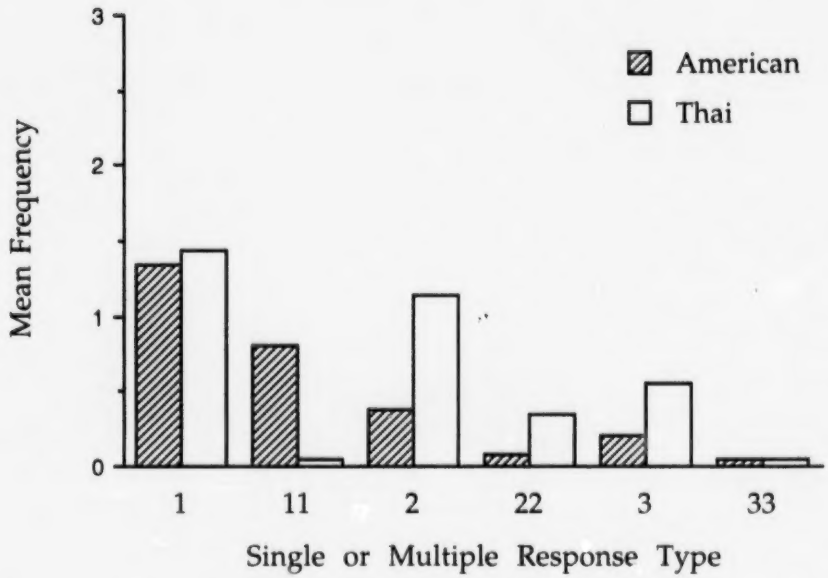

Figure 5. Single and multiple responses: Equal status only.

In analyzing the results, six factors were considered in the analysis of variance: native language (L), respondent's gender (R), complimenter's gender (C), complimenter's social status (S), type of response (T: acceptance, rejection, or indirection), and single versus multiple responses per situation (V): one [S] versus more than one [M]). The following effects were found in the analysis:

1. There is a significant V (single versus multiple responses) main effect, there being more single than multiple responses overall, F (1/76) = 103.75, p<.001 as was the LxV interaction, single responses being more common in Thai than in American English, F (1/76) = 26.48, p<.001. This interaction is supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01, Thais making significantly more single responses and slightly (but not significantly) fewer multiple responses than Americans.

2. There is a significant L (language) main effect, Americans producing more multiple responses than Thais, F (1/76) = 9.77, p<.003. So, although both groups used more single responses than multiple responses, when we consider multiple responses, we see that Americans tend to use these more often than Thais.

3. There is a significant T (type of response) main effect, acceptance being more frequent than rejection and indirection overall, F (2/152) = 232.35, p<.001. The LxT interaction was also significant, F (2/152) = 23.51, p<.001. That is, acceptance is likely to be more common in American English than in Thai. This interaction is supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01, more compliments being accepted by Americans than by Thais, but more rejected by Thais than by Americans. This T effect is identical to the T effect

in the first section on compliment response types which is illustrated in Figure 1.

4. There is an interaction of RxSxV (respondent's gender by complimenter's social status by single versus multiple responses), single responses being more common among male respondents when a complimenter is a person of equal status, F (1/76) = 8.25, p<.005. This interaction is supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01, male respondents making significantly more single responses than multiple responses to a person of equal status.

5. There is an interaction of SxT (complimenter's social status by type of response), F (2/152) = 69.95, p<.001 and an LxSxT interaction, F (2/152) = 8.62, p<.001. That is, overall, acceptance is more frequent when a complimenter is a person of higher status rather than a person of equal status. Furthermore, this pattern was more pronounced for Thais than for Americans. That is, the differences between the responses to higher- and equal-status complimenters were higher for Thais than for Americans. These interactions are supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01 which indicates that in Thai, more compliments were accepted from a higher-status complimenter, but more were rejected from an equal- status complimenter.

6. There is a significant VxT interaction (single versus multiple responses by type of response), F (2/152) = 25.35, p<.001, and an LxVxT interaction, F (2/152) = 9.49, p<.001. Inspection of Figures 4 and 5 indicates that, in general, single acceptance occurred more frequently than multiple acceptance. Furthermore, Thais tend to use single acceptance more often than Americans do. These interactions are supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01, Thais making significantly more single acceptance than Americans, and Americans making significantly more multiple acceptance than Thais.

7. There is a significant SxVxT interaction (complimenter's social status by single versus multiple responses by type of response), F (2/152) = 12.20, p<.001 as well as an LxSxVxT interaction, F (2/152) = 8.55, p<.001. Inspection of Figures 4 and 5 indicates that, in general, single responses are more common than multiple responses when the complimenter is a person of higher status. Moreover, Thais are likely to limit themselves to single responses with a complimenter of higher status than are Americans. These interactions are supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, p<.01, Thais making significantly more single acceptance and slightly (but not significantly) more single rejection and more single indirection to a higher-status complimenter than Americans.

Compound Responses

Compound responses are those containing more than one type of strategy such as acceptance and indirection (e.g., Thank you. You like it?). Each response type in the combination can occur more than once. For example, the possible combinations of Types 1 and 2 can be 112, 121, 122, 211, 1121, 2111, etc. Compound responses occurred with low frequency in this study.

This section presents the mean frequency of compound responses followed by the analysis of variance results. All means and standard

deviations for all cells appear in Table 8 below. Like the previous tables and figures, the means presented in Tables 8 and 9 and Figure 6 indicate the average number of times a particular type is used over four situations. The fact that no combinations of strategies occurred with frequency greater than one shows that, on average, they did not occur even once in a set of four situations.

Table 7

Mean Frequency of Compound Responses (N= 80 per mean)

Type	Am. Higher		Thai Higher		Am. Equal		Thai Equal	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
12	0.33	0.52	0.28	0.54	0.83	0.86	0.24	0.56
13	0.46	0.70	0.25	0.56	0.32	0.57	0.12	0.31
23	0.07	0.24	0.03	0.16	0.02	0.12	0.11	0.25
123	0.05	0.22	0.03	0.17	0.02	0.12	0.00	0.00

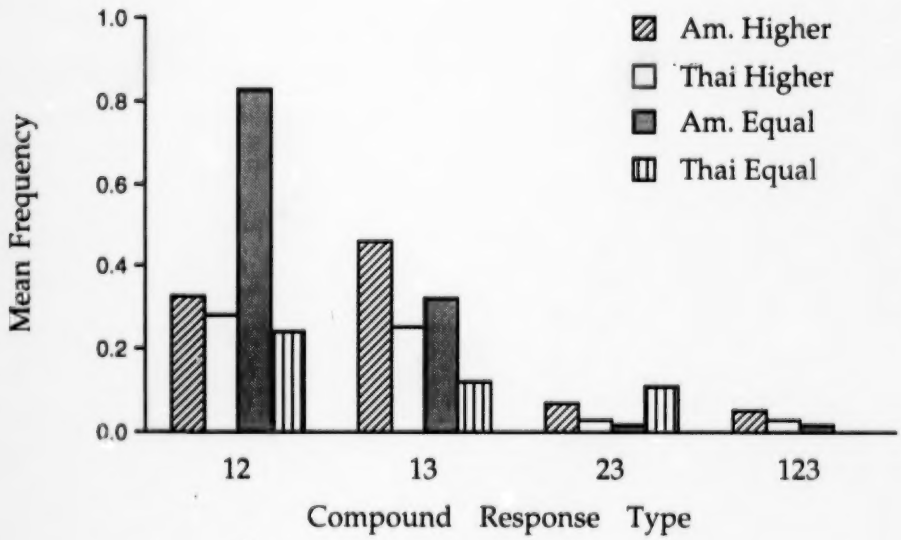

Figure 6. Compound responses.

In analyzing the results, five factors were considered in the analysis of variance: native language (L), respondent's gender (R), complimenter's gender (C), complimenter's social status (S), and type of response (T) (12, 13, 23, and 123). The following effects were found in the analysis:

1. There is a significant L (language) main effect, Americans using multiple responses more than Thais, $F(1/76) = 9.77$, $p<.003$.

2. There is a significant T (type of response) main effect, $F(3/288) = 50.83$, $p<.001$ as well as a significant LxT interaction, $F(3/288) = 9.13$, $p<.001$. That is, overall, the combination of acceptance and rejection (type 1 and type 2) occurred more frequently than the other types. Furthermore, Americans are likely to use this combination more often than Thais. This interaction is

supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, $p<.01$, Americans making significantly more combinations of acceptance and rejection than Thais.

3. There is an interaction of CxT (complimenter's gender by type of response), self-contradiction by pairing acceptance and rejection responses being equally common when a complimenter was a male or a female, but accepting and giving an indirect response being more common when the complimenter was a female, $F(3/288) = 6.30$, $p<.001$. However, this interaction is not supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, pairing of acceptance and rejection responses being slightly (but not significantly) more frequent when the complimenter is a male, but the pairing of acceptance with indirection (type 1 and type 3) being significantly more frequent when the complimenter is a female.

4. There is an interaction of SxT (complimenter's social status by type of response), self-contradiction oneself by pairing acceptance with rejection (type 1 and type 2) being more frequent when a complimenter is a person of equal status, $F(3/288) = 11.52$, $p<.001$. The LxSxT interaction was also significant, $F(3/288) = 10.58$, $p< .001$. Both interactions can be attributed to this single mean. Inspection of Figure 7 indicates that Americans are much more likely to reverse their responses by combining acceptance with rejection to a person of equal status than are Thais. These interactions are supported by the Tukey HSD comparisons, $p<.01$, Americans making significantly more self-contradiction when a complimenter is a person of equal status than Thais.

Discussion

In the previous secion, we looked at compliment responses in rigid categories. In this section, however, we will refine our views through a qualitative analysis of the responses. As discussed earlier that for one receiving a compliment, there is a pressure to agree with the complimenter. On the other hand, there is also a strong desire to avoid self-praise (Pomerantz, 1978). Different types of responses resolve this tension in different ways. Accepting a compliment, for example, places a greater value on agreeing with the complimenter; on the other hand, rejecting the compliment emphasizes the need to avoid self-praise. However, not all acceptances are bold-faced acceptances, and not all rejections turn down the compliment out of hand. We propose that there is a continuum showing that within each of these general strategies, there are a number of variations that attempt to balance the need to agree and the need to avoid self-praise in different ways.

In placing specific strategies along the continuum, we will consider both the degree to which they demonstrate an agreement with the compliment and/or the degree to which they express self-praise avoidance. The more direct the strategies are, the closer they get to one end of the continuum or the other. Those that are indirect will fall between the two extremes. The continuum of compliment responses is illustrated and exemplified in Figure 7 below.

Direct Agreement					Direct Self-praise Avoidance
(Self-praise)					(Disagreement)
I'm great	I like it, too	Thank you	I'm glad you liked it	I was lucky	I don't think so

Figure 7. A continuum of compliment responses.

Notice that direct agreement with a compliment results in self-praise and, likewise, that direct avoidance of self-praise results in a disagreement. What's more, to the extent that strategies tend to involve disagreement, they also express humility.

Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that when the speaker makes a direct utterance, he/she goes "on record" as expressing unambiguous intention and committing him/herself to what is said. For example, in saying I promise to come tomorrow, the speaker expresses the intention of committing to the future act. On the other hand, when he/she makes an indirect utterance, he/she goes "off record" as expressing more than one intention so that he/she cannot be held to one particular intent. For example, in saying I'm out of cash, the speaker may be implying that the hearer should lend him/her money. However, if the hearer challenges the speaker's right to make such a request, he/she can deny that he/she was requesting money at all, claiming that he/she was simply giving the hearer information about him/herself. In so doing, the speaker is held responsible only for the conventional meaning of what he/she says but not for that seems to imply.

As we discuss each strategy along the continuum, we will determine the extent to which each strategy is direct or indirect. Our primary tool for making this distinction will be to examine whether there is any hidden implication and, if so, whether the implied message can be denied by the speaker. Single responses will be discussed first followed by multiple and compound responses.

Single Responses

Praise Upgrade

The first strategy that we will consider is what Herbert (1989) refers to as praise upgrade, in which the respondent intensifies the praise offered in the original compliment. Herbert notes that these responses "directly violate the requirement to avoid self-praise" in responding to compliments but indicates that these responses "typically have a joking or playful connotation" (p. 13). Herbert notes that such responses are infrequent in his data, and the same was true in this study: only one situation elicited this type of response in Thai, as shown in example 1, and two from Americans, both by the same person, as presented in examples 2and 3.

Example 1

SA: Mai yak roo na wa ther nee rong pleng proh
not know that you sing song well
'I didn't know you could sing so well.'

SB: Ko roo wai sia si
(particle) know already (particle)
'Now you know.'

Example 2

SA: I really enjoyed tonight's concert. Your performance was excellent.

SB: I must be a musical prodigy.

Example 3

SA: Your paintings are the most outstanding ones in this exhibition.

SB: Creativity must be a gift.

When the respondents explicitly praise themselves and enhance the value of the compliment, they demonstrate a direct agreement with the compliment because they cannot upgrade the things with which they disagree. In so far as they are seen as exaggerated and humorous, however, these features may tend to offset the impact of this directness and dampen the self-praise that it implies.

Bald Acceptance

Among the responses in the data produced by this study, there are a number that seem to intensify the compliment as in praise upgrade, but without the exaggeration or the humor. These leave one with the feeling not only that the respondent agrees with the compliment but that he/she is taking full credit for the praiseworthy nature of what is being complimented. Americans use this type of response often when the compliments address their school work. Consider, for example, the responses in the following short dialogues taken from the data:

Example 4

SA: I heard you got straight A's last semester. Good job.

SB: I worked hard for it.

Example 5

SA: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.

SB: I put a lot of time into it.

In both of these cases, Speaker B seems to agree that the focus of the compliment is praiseworthy. He/She says nothing in either case to discount its value and, therefore, expresses a direct acceptance. Furthermore, by indicating that he/she put a great deal of effort into earning the grades or making the presentation, the speaker seems to be praising him/herself for being a hard worker. In that sense, he/she seems to be taking credit not only for the result of his/her hard work but for the work itself. This strategy, therefore, shows indirect self-praise. The speakers can deny that they praised themselves since they merely pointed out the fact that the result complimented required hard work.

That the intensification of the compliment inherent in these responses is apparently serious distinguishes them from the other more playful upgrading response described by Herbert and gives them an essentially

different impact. Since the respondents do not merely accept the compliment but increase the level of praise originally offered rather than avoiding it, we might refer to this type of response as bald acceptance.

Simple Agreement

Another strategy used by some respondents was that of the Americans who indicated the acceptance of the compliment through simple agreement. Such a response sometimes takes a form essentially like that of the compliment itself, as shown in example 6, and at other times there is little formal similarity, as illustrated in example 7. In all cases, however, the fact that the respondent agrees with the compliment is clear. Respondents simply say that they concur in what the complimenter has just said and, therefore, demonstrate a direct agreement. However, this type of response does not have an effect of enhancing the value of the compliment. Because it involves less self-praise, it is placed next to praise upgrade and bald acceptance on the continuum of compliment responses. This response type appears nowhere in the Thai data.

Example 6

SA: Your article was interesting. I really liked it.
SB: I thought it was interesting, too.

Example 7

SA: Hey! This is delicious.
SB: I like it, too.

Appreciation

The most common response to a compliment by both Americans and Thais was the use of Thank you, used by itself or jointly with some other expression. For the most part, Thank you has been categorized as an acceptance strategy (Herbert, 1989; Holmes, 1988a). Pomerantz (1978) notes that the effect of this phrase is to acknowledge the status of the prior statement as a compliment without overtly agreeing with its content, and this seems to be an accurate description of its function. However, the use of the term acknowledge in this context raises a question as to what it means to accept a compliment. One can acknowledge a compliment without agreeing that it is justified; in such cases, one is accepting the compliment much as one would accept a gift. On the other hand, accepting a compliment can also suggest that the person involved agrees with the force of that compliment and is taking credit for the praiseworthy nature of what is being complimented. Thank you, in itself, therefore, does not carry enough information for us to say which of these two types of acceptance it is intended to imply. The following example demonstrates that Thank you is a direct indicator of gratitude but only an indirect indication of agreement.

Example 8

SA: I went to see the play last night. You were terrific.
SB: Thank you.

In saying Thank you, Speaker B is expressing appreciation. However, if someone were to ask Speaker B "Can we assume that your 'Thank you' shows you agree that you were terrific?", he/she could say that he/she said Thank you because he/she appreciated the fact that Speaker A thought he/

she was terrific, but did not mean to say that he/she was. Therefore, no one can hold the speaker responsible for the agreement because there is nothing explicit about it.

It will be shown later that there are a number of instances in the data in which Thank you is combined with another expression which indicates the stance that the speaker is trying to take, i.e., whether he/she intends to scale down the force of the compliment or clearly accepts (and sometimes enhances) the full force of the compliment. Because a simple Thank you may express agreement but does not necessarily do so, it is placed very near the middle of our continuum.

Concerns

This strategy is placed in the middle of the continuum because the respondents do not take a stand on whether they accept or disagree with the compliment. They are avoiding both self-praise and disagreement at the same time. Such responses usually use the adjective "glad" to show concerns for the complimenter, as illustrated in examples 9 and 10 below. This response strategy did not appear in the Thai corpus.

Example 9

SA: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.
SB: I'm glad you liked it.

Example 10

SA: Your article was interesting. I really liked it.
SB: I'm glad you find it interesting.

When Speaker B says that he/she is glad Speaker A liked the object, Speaker B does not indicate that he/she liked it as well. At the same time, though Speaker B does not accept the compliment, he/she does not disagree with it, either. Therefore, Speaker B is avoiding any direct agreement or disagreement. Besides, by including the complimenter in their responses, the respondents show that the complimenter's judgment is highly valued. In so doing, they attend to the complimenter's positive face and avoid praising themselves.

Return

Another type of compliment response is what Holmes (1988a) calls the return compliment and Herbert (1989) refers to simply as return. In this type of response, speakers agree with the compliment and say that whatever praise the compliment directs at them could equally well be attributed to the complimenter, as shown in examples 11 and 12 below. Holmes (1988a) notes that returning the compliment in this way "indicates that the recipient agrees with the content and accepts credit for the positive evaluation" (p. 493).

Example 11

SA: Rein keng jung
study smart indeed
'You're a very good student.'
SB: Ther ko keng muen kun
you smart too
'So are you.'

Example 12

SA: I didn't know you could sing so well.

SB: I bet you could sing just as well as I could.

However, in spite of the fact that return compliment responses may seem to agree with the compliment and accept the praise it offers, this type of response is more mitigated than the other strategies we have already discussed. In redirecting the compliment back to the complimenter, Speaker B diminishes the level of praise originally directed to him/her. If the complimenter is also worthy of equivalent praise, then the recipient is less unique and the degree of praise due to him/her is also lower. In this sense, the return of the compliment therefore, involves indirect avoidance of self-praise. The speaker can deny that he/she is rejecting the compliments, on the other hand, he/she does not say explicitly that he/she is not good. Furthermore, returning the compliment also shifts the focus of the conversation from the person originally complimented to the complimenter, a strategy that indicates to the latter that he/she is important to the other. In this way, the respondent is demonstrating regard for the complimenter's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Qualification

With this strategy, respondents accept the compliment with qualification. By qualifying the compliment, the respondents show that they agree that the object complimented is worthy of praise, but they do not want to accept the full compliment. This strategy, therefore, has the effect of both agreeing with the compliment while at the same time avoiding self-praise.

Example 13

SA: Pood pasa ungrit keng jung leuy took khon pra tub jai maag
speak language English well indeed everyone impress much
'Your English is really good. Everyone was impressed.'

SB: Tae sam niang pom mai muen chao kong pasa rog na
but accent my not similar owner language (particle)
'But I don't sound like a native speaker.'

Example 14

SA: I heard you got straight A's last semester. Good job.

SB: I had to work hard for it.

Although the line between clearly defined examples of bald acceptance and qualification is sometimes easily drawn, there are quite a few responses in our data that are not so obviously members of one of these two sets or the other. Manes (1983) and Chen (1993), for example, contend that responses like those in examples 4 and 5 under bald acceptance should actually be considered as instances of qualification because the respondents point out that their achievement is the result of hard work, not talent or inborn quality. They see these two responses as essentially the same as that in example 14. There does, however, seem to be a difference: in example 14 the fact that the respondent was forced to work hard whether he/she wanted to or not in order to achieve the result that he/she is being complimented for is made explicit by the use of the modal have to, while those in examples 4 and 5 seem to give us no reason to believe that the respondents' hard work was not voluntary and, therefore, praiseworthy in itself. Such an interpretation is

supported by interviews with American students who took part in this study: they indicated that if they felt they did not work hard enough to achieve something, they should not accept praise for their results. For example, if they got a good grade without studying really hard, yet someone gave them a compliment, they should not accept it. When they responded to a compliment by saying that they had worked hard, they said, they believed that the praise inherent in the compliment belonged to them. They were proud of their achievement and so accepted the recognition the compliment implied.

Nonetheless, the fact that Manes (1983) and Chen (1993) categorize these responses as qualification, while others, from an equally principled position, interpret them differently demonstrates the difficulty of assigning all compliment responses to rigid and mutually exclusive sets.

Shift Credit

We have seen, then, that some compliment responses, e.g., bald acceptance, make it clear that the speaker agrees with the compliment and accepts credit for the situation it describes. At the same time, other responses (those involving qualification) seem to agree that the thing complimented is praiseworthy, but distance the respondent from it and from the praise it has been given. Another strategy that has the same effect as qualification is often termed shift credit, in which credit for the thing complimented is shifted from the recipient to some third party.

Example 15

SA: Wai keng jung nuuk yoo laew wa tong chana ngae ngae
swim good indeed think already must win sure sure
'You're so good (a swimmer). I knew you were going to win.'

SB: Khun kru fuk dee maag kwa
teacher train good more
'I have a good coach.'

Example 16

SA: Hey! This is delicious.

SB: I got the recipe from my mom.

Pomerantz (1978), Holmes (1988a), Herbert (1989), and Chen (1993) all point out that the responses which indicate the shift of credit provide a nice solution to solve the conflict between being cooperative while adhering to the modesty maxim. That is, the respondent agrees with the complimenter that the object of praise is worth complimenting, but at the same time, he/she avoids praising him/herself by indicating that the credit belongs elsewhere.

Scale Down

While shift credit seems to indicate that the object complimented is praiseworthy, an alternate strategy tends to play down the value of the thing praised, thereby, demonstrating a partial and indirect rejection of the compliment itself. For this reason, it is placed more to the right side of the continuum than the other strategies discussed so far. It is termed scale down by Herbert (1989). With scale down responses, the respondent can diminish the praiseworthy nature of the compliment in various ways. One way is to use self-denigration, as an illustrated in examples 17and 18 below.

Example 17

SA: Rien keng jung
study smart indeed
'You're a very good student.'

SB: Mai keng tao rai rog
not smart much
'I'm not that good.'

Example 18

SA: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.

SB: I kind of messed up.

The self-denigration strategy appeared 98 times in the Thai data as compared to 27 times in the American corpus. Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that the compliment responses which involve self-denigration can be seen as damaging to the addressee's face. However, in Thai culture, when one downgrades him/herself, he/she, in turn, upgrades his/her image in the eyes of others by showing that he/she is a humble person (Richards & Sukwiwat, 1983).

There is another way to scale down the worth of a compliment: that is, to indicate that the achievement is a result of good fortune, and, therefore, the respondent does not deserve to be complimented. Consider examples 19 and 20.

Example 19

SA: Term tee laew dai kao war dai A ruad keng jung
term last heard news got A straight smart indeed
'I heard you got straight A's last semester. Good job.'

SB: Fluke maag kwa
fluke more
'It was just a fluke.'

Example 20

SA: You're so good (a swimmer). I knew you were going to win.

SB: It was pure luck.

This type of response is considered a denial by Manes (1983). However, if we consider the fact that the respondents attribute their success to some force such as luck, this strategy can also be seen as shift credit. In examples 15 and 16 above, the respondents indicate that the credit should be transferred to some third party who is responsible for their achievement; in examples 19, and 20, they also point out that their success is due to some kind of fortune. The only difference is that in examples 15 and 16, the credit is shifted to some human being whereas in examples 19, and 20, it is transferred to some inhuman force. In both cases, the person complimented does not disagree that the thing complimented is praiseworthy, but does avoid self-praise by assigning credit for the thing praised to some other source. Therefore, we may need to reconsider the general framework of compliment responses in that this type of response should be considered a shift credit rather than a denial.

This type of response appeared 31 times in the Thai data as compared to 9 times in the American corpus. A Thai response such as Choke dee maag kwa (I was just lucky) reflects a basic belief in Thai culture that one's achievements can be attributed to some uncontrolled forces. Mortlock (1988)

notes that there is a Buddhist belief that what one is today depends not only on one's actions in this life, but also, to some extent, on what has happened in one's previous lives. If one did good deeds in past lives, the merit will contribute to his/her opportunity or good qualities in the present life, such as winning a scholarship, being wealthy, or being smart. Therefore, one does not have absolute control over his/her life. A person's life is rather a continuation of lifetimes, each of which may have some effect on the current situation. By saying I was just lucky, the Thai respondent indicates that though he/she may work hard and the results may be good, there are some uncontrollable forces that contribute to the achievement. Therefore, he/she does not deserve full credit.

Total Rejection

While return compliment, concerns, qualification, and scale down show that the respondents diminish the value of the compliment to some extent, in the final strategy, which can be termed total rejection, the respondent clearly indicates that the praise is overdone and unwarranted (Pomerantz, 1978) as illustrated in examples 21 and 22. This strategy was used 29 times in the Thai data as compared to 9 times in the American corpus.

Example 21

SA: Your paintings are the most outstanding ones in this exhibition.
SB: I don't think so.

Example 22

SA: Chan wa paap kong ther den tee sud nai ngan nee leuy
I think painting your outstanding most in exhibition this (particle)
'Your paintings are the most outstanding ones in this exhibition.'
SB: Mai jing rog
no true (particle)
'That's not true.'

In the above instances, the respondents directly and strongly disagree with the compliments. They assert that the compliments are in error and, therefore, refuse to accept the positive value expressed in them.

So far, we have shown that there are a number of strategies which are used to mitigate a compliment and, in some way, to avoid self-praise. In all of these, there seems to be an overriding need to demonstrate humility which runs through the different ways of diminishing a compliment.

The data show that the responses that expressed self-praise avoidance of some sort were used more frequently when the complimenters were peers than when they were of higher status. However, this pattern is more pronounced in Thai than in American English. That is, the tendency that Thais will reject the compliment increases about 21% when the complimenter is a peer, while for Americans, it rises about 10%. The reason seems to be that some compliment situations involve a competition among peers such as a test, a class presentation, or a swimming competition. Therefore, when the Thai students outperform their peers, they seem to find it difficult to accept a compliment. They appear to be sensitive to their friends' poorer performance and, therefore, are likely to downgrade themselves for fear of hurting the feelings of their friends.

This finding reflects the fact that Thais stress the importance of homogeneity. Mortlock (1988) observes that Thais feel more comfortable being a member of a crowd rather than an individual. In Thailand, it is important to be an integral part of a group and to share the same bonds. Since a Thai peer group emphasizes reciprocity, to downgrade oneself implies that one is not superior to his/her peers. In so doing, the harmony of the peer group is maintained.

The response strategies we have discussed so far were placed on the continuum on the basis of their demonstration of agreement on the one hand or self-praise avoidance on the other. However, there is another set of compliment responses that we have not discussed yet for which it is difficult to be sure exactly what position the speaker intends to take. The earlier responses were often indirect in that at least part of their message was only implied and therefore deniable. With this new set, on the other hand, we are often uncertain as to what meaning the response is intended to convey. That is, the speakers do not make clear whether they are agreeing or avoiding self-praise. Therefore, the impact of these responses may not be immediately understood. The meaning the speaker intends can be interpreted in different ways depending upon the context in which the responses occur. In fact, in the interviews, both Americans and Thais indicated that they could not explain exactly what they had in mind when making such responses. There are several forms of this type of response. The first form is shown in examples 23 and 24 below.

Example 23

SA: I went to see the play last night. You were terrific.
SB: You think so?

Example 24

SA: Pood pasa ungrit keng jung leuy took khon pra tub jai maag
speak language English well indeed everyone impress much
'Your English is really good. Everyone was impressed.'
SB: Jing rue
True (question marker)
'Really?'

Though Herbert (1989) categorized such responses as the non-agreement type, in which the respondent did not show a direct agreement with the compliment assertion, he did note that it was possible to argue that such responses could fall between agreement and non-agreement types. He points out that such responses are ambiguous because the speaker's intention is unclear. Holmes (1988a) and Chen (1993) further contend that by expressing doubt, the respondent indicates that "I want to agree with you but I don't want to praise myself." According to this interpretation, this response, therefore, meets the conditions of agreeing and avoiding self-praise at the same time.

However, since such responses take the form of a question, it can also be understood that the respondents are questioning the sincerity of the complimenters. Yet, if the respondents sincerely think their performance is not praiseworthy, these responses can be perceived as indicating that the speakers fully and genuinely reject the compliments; they ask the question because they are surprised at the compliments. However, it can be the case

that the respondents totally agree with the compliments but pretend to disagree with them. Therefore, when they ask the question Really? or You think so?, it means they want to hear more compliments and that they are showing a false modesty. Finally, by saying Really?, it is possible that the respondents will accept the compliment on condition that the complimenter asserts the compliment again. In short, it is shown that besides the literal meaning of a question, this type of response can have various other interpretations.

Another ambiguous response type is shown in examples 25and 26 below.

Example 25

SA: I went to see the play last night. You were terrific.

SB: Thanks for coming.

Example 26

SA: Chan pai doo lakorn ma mue kuun nee ther len dee dee
I went see play last night you play well well
'I went to see the play last night. You were terrific.'

SB: Kob khun tee ma doo
thank you for come
'Thank you for coming.'

The literal meaning of this type of response is that the respondents are appreciative of the fact that the complimenters came to see the show. This response, therefore, is unrelated to the compliment itself, suggesting that the respondent completely ignores it. However, if the respondents believe that their performances were good, they are accepting the compliments by thanking the complimenters for coming to see their "terrific" performances. Yet, it can be perceived that the respondents do not want to accept the compliments out right. They are showing humility by redirecting the attention to the complimenter. In sum, it appears that such responses can be understood in different ways.

Another type of ambiguous response is presented below.

Example 27

SA: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.

SB: Did you like the graphics?

This type of response can be understood literally as saying that the respondent is simply inquiring for more information about the object complimented. That is, he/she is not particularly concerned with the compliment itself. However, if the respondent is glad to be complimented, he/she is accepting the compliment and wants the complimenter to expand it. Therefore, the intention of the respondent is unclear.

It appears that the responses in this category can be perceived differently by different hearers. As with the responses we discussed earlier, in addition to their literal meanings, there are implicit meanings associated with them. The underlying meanings are also ambiguous in multiple ways. Therefore, it seems that unless one knew the speaker's personality and disposition, and the context in which the compliment was made, etc. one could not tell exactly what the respondent meant when making such responses. As we have noted, both American and Thai informants indicated

that they could not explain exactly what they had in mind when making such responses.

It should be noted that, regardless of culture, the respondents are more likely to use indirect responses of this type, both as a single response and in combination with Thank you, when replying to a female complimenter. Holmes (1988b) points out that compliments from women often function as a token of negotiation designed to keep an interaction going, and it appears that the respondents in this study also wanted to carry on the conversation with the female complimenters. In other words, if they had used direct responses, the conversation would likely have been completed in one turn. On the other hand, indirect responses of this type allowed them to continue negotiating for meaning, thus leading the interlocutors to engage in a longer conversation with the complimenters.

In summary, we have seen that there is a continuum of compliment responses ranging from a simple agreement (with its inherent self-praise) to a complete disagreement (with its avoidance of that praise). Within this continuum, there are responses which attempt to balance the forces of these two extremes. In this sense, we have seen that an individual response can perform various functions at the same time such as both accepting and mitigating the compliment. However, this is not surprising because Thomas (1985) has already pointed out that a speech act is complex. That is, an utterance can fill multiple functions at one time. The data presented in this section support Thomas's claim and show that there are difficulties in assigning all compliment responses to mutually exclusive categories.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that brief single responses are more common in Thai than in American English. Thais used single responses about 89% of the time while Americans used them 65.2% of the time. The reason may be that expressions of praise are less open in Thai culture. In conversations with other Thais, it was agreed that the act of complimenting is infrequent in Thai culture because it is usual for one to keep his/her admiration for somebody to him/herself and not to express it openly. Admiration, however, can be expressed non-verbally such as by smiling and nodding. Also, it is not uncommon for a person to praise another indirectly such as by complimenting him/her to the third person. For example, a Thai professor might say to another professor X is an excellent student. Therefore, when one is complimented directly and verbally, he/she may not take it very well. As a result, Thais are likely to quickly dismiss such compliments by giving brief responses to the compliments as evidenced by the findings of this study.

Multiple and Compound Responses

So far, we have focused on single responses which fall along the continuum. In this section, we will discuss responses which occur jointly with one or more other expressions. The data show that Thais used these types of responses approximately 10% of the time whereas Americans used them about 35% of the time.

As we mentioned above, a single Thank you does not provide enough information about whether the respondent is completely accepting the compliment or merely acknowledging it. However, when Thank you is

combined with other expressions, the position of the respondent can be clearly indicated. About 61.5% of multiple and compound responses are a combination of Thank you with other strategies, and the data show that Americans used such combinations more frequently than Thais. Consider examples 27 and 28 below.

Example 27

SA: You did really good. The test was tough.

SB: Thank you. I studied a lot.

Example 28

SA: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.

SB: Thank you. I thought it was enjoyable also.

In these instances, the positive comments which follow Thank you suggest that the respondents not only accept the compliments but also agree with them. Therefore, the use of Thank you in these cases is clearly an acceptance of and a direct agreement with the compliments. However, there are instances in which Thank you is followed by a mitigation of some sort as in examples 29 and 30 below.

Example 29

SA: You're a very good student.

SB: Thanks. I bet you are, too.

Example 30

SA: Hey! This is delicious.

SB: Thank you. It's my mom's recipe.

In these instances, Thank you suggests that the respondents agree with the content of the compliments. However, they do not want to praise themselves and, therefore, diminish self-praise by redirecting the focus of the praise to the complimenters as in example 29 or by transferring the credit to another person as in example 30. This type of response, therefore, falls between agreement and self-praise avoidance on the continuum.

Also, there are instances when Thank you is followed by a negative comment that borders on disagreement, as in examples 31 and 32 below.

Example 31

SA: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.

SB: Thank you but it's not very good.

Example 32

SA: Your paintings are the most outstanding ones in this exhibition.

SB: Thank you but I find others more interesting.

In these cases, the respondents diminish the value of the objects complimented after saying Thank you. By saying Thank you, they recognize the fact that the complimenter has said something nice about them, but they do not agree with the positive value expressed in the compliments. The disagreement is demonstrated by the use of the conjunction "but." Therefore, in examples 31 and 32, the subsequent disagreement with the compliment shows that Thank you is intended to be a mere expression of acknowledgment of the fact that the compliment is being made.

The responses shown in examples 31 and 32 above are made often by Americans, about 1 out of 5 times, especially when the complimenter has a peer status. As Pomerantz (1978) points out, the recipient of a compliment is confronted with a conflict in that accepting a compliment can be seen as self-

praise while at the same time it is impolite to disagree with the complimenter; Brown and Levinson (1987) thus recommend that if one is to disagree with an interlocutor, he/she should pretend to agree with the compliment or hide disagreement. The Thank you but response, therefore, appears to be a good solution to the conflict. That is, the respondent expresses at least token agreement with the compliment by expressing gratitude, before going on to playing it down. The use of such responses indicates that Americans take the conflict of agreeing and denying into consideration, and try to balance the need to agree and the need to avoid self-praise in their responses.

In sum, we have seen that Thank you has different meanings depending upon the expressions that follow it. This, therefore, supports our earlier claim that a single Thank you does not carry sufficient information about whether the speaker accepts or acknowledges the compliment. Furthermore, it seems that Thank you is non-predictive. That is, it does not predict any particular kind of second response.

Nonetheless, the analyses show that Thais prefer a simple Thank you more than do Americans. Moreover, they used it 62.4% of the time when accepting the compliment from a higher-status complimenter. When they said Thank you, the Thai subjects who participated in this study indicated that it was an expression of gratitude. They pointed out that complimenting occurs infrequently between teachers and students. This is likely due to the belief in Thai culture that complimenting can lead one to be overly confident. There is also an educational principle that teachers should not show favor toward any particular student. With these two notions combined, Thai teachers and professors are very careful in showing their admiration of their students. As a result, complimenting does not occur often between teachers and students. Thus, when students are complimented by their professors, they take it in high regard and really do appreciate it. The students in this study pointed out that they trusted that a professor's praise was more sincere than that from peers who might feel obliged to say something nice about each other. They also contended that when complimented by a professor, they believed that they must have done so outstanding a job that it caught the professor's attention. Furthermore, professors' compliments were perceived as being more meaningful than a friend's because they came from a person who was well trained in the field. In general, Thai students take compliments from professors seriously because they come from a more credible source.

There are, however, a small number of instances in the Thai data which suggest that Thank you is not always an expression of appreciation. Consider example 33 below.

Example 33

SA: Rai ngan kong ther tam dee maag kru chob sanuk dee.
presentation your good very teacher liked enjoyable indeed
'I really enjoyed your presentation. It was enjoyable.'

SB: Kob khun ka noo tang jai tam tem tee
thank you I intentionally do (intensifier)
'Thank you. I really worked hard on it.'

Though responses like example 33 were rare in the Thai data, it raises the possibility that Thank you does not always show appreciation. Example

33 shows that the respondent both accepts and agrees with the compliment. Therefore, Thank you in this case is an acceptance.

It was shown above that there are instances when the respondent attempts to balance the conflict between agreeing and denying the compliment by combining Thank you with mitigation of some sort. However, the data show that there are cases in which respondents do not attempt to soften disagreement. Rather, they directly disagree with the complimenter by totally rejecting the praise and denigrating the praiseworthiness of the object complimented as exemplified in examples 34 and 35. In this type of multiple response, all elements contribute to the disagreement and to the direct avoidance of self-praise.

Example 34

SA: Term tee laew dai kao war dai A ruad keng jung
term last heard news got A straight smart indeed
'I heard you got straight A's last semester. Good job.'

SB: Mai jing rog fluke maag kwa
not true fluke more
'That's not true. It was just a fluke.'

Example 35

SA: Your paintings are the most outstanding ones in this exhibition.

SB: I don't think I really like my paintings. I find others more interesting.

This type of response appeared 25 times in the Thai data as compared to 4 times in the American corpus. Such responses may seem abrupt to Americans, who are likely to use Thank you but as shown above to diminish the impact of disagreement. These instances show that Americans do not prefer an abrupt disagreement as much as do Thais. Levinson (1983) contends that the abrupt responses are dispreferred actions and, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), they are face-threatening to complimenters. Therefore, such responses do not occur frequently among Americans.

In conclusion, we have seen that there are various ways Americans and Thais handle the conflict between agreeing with and denying a compliment. Most of the strategies Americans used tend to be on the agreement side of the continuum: 72.9% of all strategies used by Americans were agreement of one sort or another; in contrast, for Thais, the comparable figure is 50.8%. Therefore, it seems that Americans are willing to agree with a compliment more often than are Thais. Thus, in American English, it is appropriate to accept a compliment graciously rather than to disagree with the opinions of a complimenter. Furthermore, despite the fact that Thais also tend to agree with a compliment, the findings show that 32.3% of the strategies used by Thais tend to be on the self-praise avoidance side, whereas for Americans, the comparable figure is 15.8%. Thus, it is suggested that Thais are inclined to deny compliments more often than are Americans. Therefore, showing humility by avoiding self-praise is more apparent in Thai than in American English.

It is interesting to note that even though Holmes (1988b) and Herbert (1990) reported that there are gender-related differences in compliment and compliment responses, this study found that the gender of the complimenter and receiver had minor effects on responses. The differences in the findings

may be due to the topic of compliment in this study which is exclusively about ability and performance. If the topic had been about something other than achievement such as appearance, for example You look nice today, the male and female respondents might have had different reactions to the compliments. It is also possible that they might have responded to compliments on appearance differently when they came from a man as opposed to a woman. However, this study has shown that compliments on achievement do not elicit any gender-related differences.

Pedagogical Implications

It appears that there are both similarities and differences in the ways that Americans and Thais respond to compliments. For example, both Americans and Thais tend to accept compliments from those of higher status. However, the strategies they use seem to be different. The teaching of compliment responses in the two languages, therefore, should focus on the differing strategies Americans and Thais use to accept and reject compliments.

It was shown above that saying Thank you is a strategy frequently used by both Americans and Thais to accept a compliment. However, while Thais tend to use it with a person of higher status only, Americans are likely use it in a wider range of situations with various meanings associated with it. Therefore, Thais should be made aware of the differing meanings of Thank you in American English and learn to interpret it using the comments that follow as clues. Teachers should also point out to Thai students that Thank you can be used even when one wants to disagree with a compliment because one should at least thank a complimenter for saying something nice before disagreeing with him/her.

It was also shown that Thais tend to be brief with their responses such as by using a simple Thank you when accepting a compliment. Thus, teachers should show that compliment responses in American English can be extended such as by adding a statement or two about the object complimented after saying Thank you. Wolfson (1989b) says that such acceptances can lead to longer conversational sequences. At a social gathering, for example, a compliment may serve as a conversation opener. A brief response like a simple Thank you, therefore, may prevent an attempt at a further negotiation and might lead to a communication breakdown.

Americans learning Thai compliment responses should be made aware that a brief acceptance is more appropriate than a longer one. They should be made aware that humility is primary in Thai culture and that one can be seen as boastful and conceited if he/she continues talking about the compliment.

With regard to the way one rejects a compliment, it appears that Americans try not to obviously disagree with it while Thais tend to do so. Thai students, therefore, need to learn how to soften their disagreement. For example, they should be taught different strategies which allow respondents to appear cooperative while, at the same time, disagreeing with and diminishing the worth of a compliment such as qualification, shift credit, gratification, and Thank you but.

Americans learning how to disagree with a compliment in Thai may feel the need to balance agreement with rejection, or to show gratitude first

before disagreeing with it. However, they should realize that a direct rejection is acceptable in Thai. It neither threatens the face of the complimenter nor damages the face of the respondent. It was also shown that Thais are likely to disagree with their peers more often than Americans when complimented on their performance. Teachers, therefore, should provide the cultural information that there is a strong sense of homogeneity in Thailand. That is, Thais do not like to be singled out from the crowd and appear superior to others.

Finally, the continuum of compliment responses is a good topic for discussion leading to a learning activity in a language classroom. For example, after showing students how the continuum works, teachers may ask them to place different responses on the continuum. The teachers can lead the discussion or ask the students to work in groups and discuss various responses among themselves. The class should also discuss which responses people tend to use frequently in their culture and why. Teachers should point out which strategies are often used in the target language, and the class can discuss the cross-cultural differences.

Language learners' understanding and awareness of how to act appropriately in another language is beneficial in various ways. First, it opens doors for the learners to be successful in learning the target language. Then, it prevents the hurtful feelings and negative stereotypes which cultures may have of each other. Finally, it helps facilitate cross-cultural understanding and communication.

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APPENDIX
DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST

Directions: This study consists of sixteen compliment situations. You will be asked to respond to one situation at a time.

This is the test procedure. First, I will hand you a card which describes the situation in which the compliment occurs. You should read it carefully. When you finish, you will respond to the compliment orally. Please say the first thing that comes to mind.

There are no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be tape-recorded.

1. You got an award from your department for an excellent academic performance. Today at school, your male professor comes over to greet you and says,

Professor: You're so smart. Everyone was sure you were going to get it.

You: _____

2. You have just won a scholarship to study abroad. Today is commencement day and after the ceremony, a professor comes up to congratulate you and she says,

Professor: You are an excellent student.

You : _____

3. You are applying for graduate school. You go to the registrar's office to pick up a transcript. You run into a friend there. While you are talking with him, he takes a glance at your transcript and says,

Friend: Hmm... you're a very good student.

You: _____

4. You have a class presentation today. You have a lot of nice graphics to show. The professor seems to like your performance a lot. After class, he says to you,

Professor: I really liked your presentation. It was enjoyable.

You: _____

5. You got straight A's last semester. Today is the first day of a new semester. You meet a friend at school and he says to you,

Friend: I heard you got straight A's last semester. Good job.

You: _____

6. You enrolled in a painting class this semester. When the lessons were over, the students' works are displayed at an exhibition. Your paintings get a lot of attention. A friend comes over to greet you and she says,

Friend: Your paintings are the most outstanding ones in this exhibition.

You: _____

7. Your professor holds a party at her place to celebrate the end of the semester. Just for the fun of it, everyone has to bring something they cooked. Your professor tastes your food and she says to you,

Professor: Hey! This is really delicious.

You: _____

8. You had a test last week. Today, the professor announced that you got the highest score in the class. After class, a classmate comes over to you and she says,

Classmate: You did really good. The test was very tough.

You: _____

9. You wrote an article for one of your classes. Later, it was published in a journal. Today, you meet a professor who has read your article. He says to you,

Professor: Your article is interesting. I really liked it.

You: _____

10. You joined a university's theater group. It organizes a play every semester. A play was put on last night and you had a leading role. Today at school, a female friend walks up to you and says,

Friend: I went to see the play last night. You were terrific.

You: _____

11. You enrolled in a photography class this semester. It is a requirement that every picture be reviewed in class. When you show your first picture to the class, your professor seems to like it a lot. He says,

Professor: This is a beautiful photo. I think you have a gift in photography.

You: _____

12. You are a musician. Tonight, you and the university band perform at the auditorium. After the concert, your female professor, who is in the audience, comes up to you and says,

Professor: I really enjoyed tonight's concert. Your performance was excellent.

You: _____

13. Your professor takes your class out of town on an excursion. On the way, somebody grabs a guitar and asks you to sing. After the singing, everybody gives you a big round of applause. A female friend smiles at you and she says,

Friend: I didn't know you could sing so well.

You: _____

14. You go to a library to study for an exam. As you are studying, a professor happens to walk by. So she stops and talks to you for a while. When she notices that you're studying, she says to you,

Professor: You're working real hard.

You: _____

15. You can speak Spanish/English very fluently. Today, there are visitors from Spain/The U.S. at your department. You are assigned to be their host and they are very pleased with the visit. After the visitors have left, a male friend says to you,

Friend: Your Spanish/English is very good. Everyone was impressed.

You: _____

16. You are on the university swimming team. Today, you won first place in the competition. After an awards ceremony, a male friend congratulates you and he says,

Friend: You're so good. I knew you were going to win.

You: _____